

Temple

<36624832470011

S

<36624832470011

Bayer. Staatsbibliothek

Handwritten signature or mark, possibly "H. P. 1840"

A
DISSERTATION ON LANGUAGE
IN GENERAL,

More particularly on the Beauties and Defects
of the English language:

WITH REMARKS

On the Rise and Progress of the latter;

And a short Account of the earliest Poets, and the
ancient state of the British Stage.



P A R I S.

Published

BY PARSONS AND GALIGNANI.

1805.

INVESTIGATION ON LANGUAGE

IN GENERAL

More particularly on the German and Dutch
of the English language

WITH REMARKS

On the Rise and Progress of the latter

And a short account of the earliest form and the
present state of the Dutch language



P A R T I

Second

**Bayerische
Staatsbibliothek
München**

LANGUAGE IN GENERAL.

THE principles and characteristics of Language render it a subject of pleasing and useful inquiry. It is the general vehicle of our ideas, and represents by words all the conceptions of the mind. Books and conversation are the offspring of this prolific parent. The former introduce us to the treasures of learning and science, and make us acquainted with the opinions, discoveries, and transactions of past ages; by the latter, the general intercourse of society is carried on, and our ideas are conveyed to each other with the same rapidity with which they arise in the mind. Language, in conjunction with reason, to which it gives its proper activity, use, and ornament, raises man above the lower orders of animals; and, in proportion as it is polished and refined, exalts one nation above another in the scale of civilization and intellectual dignity.

Inquiries into the nature of any particular Language, if not too abstruse and metaphysical, are subjects of pleasing and useful speculation. So close is the connection between words and ideas that no learning whatever can be obtained without their aid and interposition. In proportion as the former are studied and examined, the latter become clear and complete; and according as words convey our meaning in a full and adequate manner, we avoid

the inconvenience of being misunderstood, and are secure from the perplexity of doubt, the errors of misconception, and the cavils of dispute. It must always be remembered, that words are merely the arbitrary signs of ideas, connected with them by custom, not allied to them by nature; and that each idea, like a ray of light, is liable to be tinged by the medium of the word through which it passes. The volumes of controversy which fill the libraries of the learned would have been comparatively very small, if the disputants who wrote them had given a clear definition of their principal terms. Accurate definition is one of the most useful parts of logic; and we shall find, when we come to the examination of that subject, that it is the only solid ground upon which reason can build her arguments, and proceed to just conclusions.

In order that the true sense of words may be ascertained, and that they may strike with their whole force, derivation must lend its aid to definition. It is this which points out the source from whence a word springs, and the various streams of signification that flow from it. The student, while employed in tracing the origin of Language, and ascertaining its signification, will reap great advantage from calling history to his assistance; and he will find that allusions, idioms, and figures of speech are illustrated by particular facts, opinions, and institutions. The customs of the Greeks throw light upon the expressions of their authors: without some acquaintance with the Roman laws, many forms of expression in the orations of Cicero

are unintelligible; and many descriptions in the Old and New Testament are obscure, unless they are illustrated by a knowledge of eastern manners. Furnished with such aids, the scholar acquires complete not partial information; throws upon Language all the light that can be reflected from his general studies, and imbibes, as far as a modern can imbibe it, the true and original spirit of ancient authors.

As long as any one confines his studies to his native tongue, he cannot understand it perfectly, or ascertain with accuracy its poverty or richness, its beauties or defects. He who cultivates other languages as well as his own, gains new instruments to increase the stock of his ideas, and opens new roads to the temple of knowledge. He draws his learning from pure sources, converses with the natives of other countries without the assistance of an interpreter, and surveys the contents of books without the dim and unsteady light of translations. He may unite the speculations of a philosopher with the acquirements of a linguist; he may compare different tongues, and form just conclusions with respect to their defects and beauties, and their correspondence with the temper, genius, and manners of a people. He may trace the progress of national refinement, and discover, by a comparison of arts and improvements with their correspondent terms, that the history of Language, inasmuch as it develops the efforts of human genius and the rise and advancement of its inventions, constitutes an important part of the history of man.

Theories of the Origin of Language.

Various theories have been formed to account for the origin of language, which, however ingenious, are far from being satisfactory. The celebrated author of the *Wealth of Nations* supposes “two savages, who had never been taught to speak, and who had been bred up remote from the societies of men, would naturally begin to form that language, by which they would endeavour to make their sentiments intelligible to each other, by uttering certain sounds, whenever they meant to denote objects. Thus they would begin to give names to things, to class individual objects under a species, which they denoted by a common name, and proceed gradually to the formation of all the parts of speech¹. ”

The condition of these two savages is wholly imaginary, as it cannot apply to any persons who have ever been known to exist—It may fairly be asked, how they came into such a state? Was it in consequence of their own previous determination? If it was, then they must have conversed in order to make such an agreement. If it was not the result of such a measure, they must have been placed there by other rational and talkative beings, and must consequently have acquired from them the names which in their recluse condition they applied

¹ Considerations concerning the first formation of languages, in *Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments*, vol. II. p. 403.

to the surrounding objects. If they borrowed the terms from others, then of course the hypothesis of a language, considered as an invention of the savages themselves, falls at once to the ground.

Some instances, it may be granted, have been reported of persons who have been found in a wild state, without education or the use of speech: but no accurate and well-authenticated account is given of the exact time of life when they were first placed in such a state, or of their manner of living. Upon such weak principles therefore no argument can be established to confirm the truth of the hypothesis.

The theory of Lord Monboddo, embellished as it is by quotations from ancient authors, and supported by plausible arguments, is liable to similar objections.¹ He supposes that language was not originally natural to man, and that the political state of society was necessary for its invention. This principle forms the basis of his elaborate work on the origin and progress of language. He asserts that man in his natural state is a wild animal, without language or arts of any kind. To prove this point, he cites the opinions of Lucretius and Horace, who describe the human race as first rising from the earth, mute and savage, and living for some time in a state of war, before the invention of arts and the establishment of laws introduced the improvement of manners. He quotes descriptions from the works

¹ Origin of Language, vol. I. p. 514. 545. 626. vol. IV. p. 50.

of Diodorus Siculus, Leo Africanus, and other writers. But in the whole detail of his authorities there is not one strong and well attested fact that is strictly and indisputably to his purpose. The vague and fanciful descriptions of poets cannot be admitted as proper evidence in such a case. The accounts of Diodorus Siculus, and the other writers whom he presses into his service, are taken from the reports of credulous travellers. Some of them are not to the purpose; in many of the others are circumstances highly improbable, or evidently false. Some of the descriptions are not sufficiently accurate to enable us to ascertain, whether the beings, that were observed by travellers to live in a wild state, were really men, or inferior animals. Lord Monboddo is aware that the arguments of Rousseau, founded upon the principle that there could be no society without language, press with great force against his whole system. To what instances then has he recourse to extricate himself from the difficulty! Not to an example taken from a race of men possessing the faculty of reason, and the organs of speech, but from the beavers of Canada, and the foxes of the river Danastris! When he ought to adduce instances of men he produces those of inferior animals; and his descriptions of them are so extraordinary that they are entitled to very little credit. When he speaks of society he certainly must be understood to mean only the state of such creatures, as, destitute of the powers of colloquial intercourse, herd together merely as they are impelled by the force of instinct. Such a state is

more properly to be called gregarious than sociable; because to the latter term is always applied some idea of a disposition to converse, and to communicate thought, which is totally inconsistent with the nature of any beings not endowed with the faculty of speech.

How the original societies of men could have been formed without the aid of language, or language invented without society, are points which the disquisitions of these writers, however ingenious, are far from enabling us to settle. The only rational and satisfactory method of solving the difficulty is to refer the origin of speech to the great Creator himself. Not that it is necessary to suppose that he inspired the first parents of mankind with any particular original or primitive language, but that he made them fully sensible of the power with which they were endued of forming articulate sounds, gave them an impulse to exert it, and left the arbitrary imposition of words to their own choice. Their ingenuity was left to itself to multiply names, as new objects occurred to their observation; and thus language was gradually advanced in process of time to the different degrees of copiousness and refinement which it has reached among various nations.

This theory is conformable to the description given in the Sacred Writings, and agrees very remarkably with the opinions to be collected from prophane history. Plato maintains that the original language of man was of divine formation; and when he divides words into two classes, the

primitive and the derivative, he attributes the latter to the ingenuity of man, and the former to the immediate communication of the Supreme Being. The Egyptians, from whom this opinion was probably derived, maintained that by Thoth, the god of eloquence, their ancestors were at first taught to articulate¹.

To whatever part of the globe we direct our view, we shall find additional reasons to conclude that all the languages now spoken in the world were derived originally from one and the same source, notwithstanding their apparent difference and variety. When we remark certain words in

¹ Dr. Johnson talking of the origin of language said: "It must have come by inspiration: a thousand, nay a million of children could not invent a language. While the organs are pliable, there is not understanding enough to form a language; by the time that there is understanding enough, the organs are become stiff. We know that after a certain age we cannot learn to pronounce a new language. No foreigner, who comes to England, when advanced in life, ever pronounces English tolerably well; at least such instances are very rare. When I maintain that language must have come by inspiration, I do not mean that inspiration is required for rhetoric, and all the beauties of language; for *when once man has language*, we can conceive that he may gradually form modifications of it. I mean only that inspiration seems to me to be necessary to give man the faculty of speech; to inform him that he may have speech; which I think he could no more find out without inspiration, than cows or hogs would think of such a faculty." Boswell's Life of Johnson, vol. III. p. 460.

Latin, that resemble others in Greek, we are not surprised, considering the intimate connexion which subsisted between the two nations, and the evident derivation of the former from the latter. It is natural to suppose that the modern tongues were derived from the ancient, which were spoken in the same country. Thus all the present languages and dialects of Europe, amounting to about twenty-seven, may be traced to the Latin, German, and Slavonian. But when we observe that words used in one quarter of the globe are like those in another which is very remote, and that such words have exactly the same signification, and were so used long before the present inhabitants had any intercourse with each other, how is this to be accounted for? Several words in Welch are similar, and have a similar meaning with Latin and Greek. I am aware that this resemblance may be imputed to their common derivation from the Celtic. But whence arises the affinity in some remarkable instances between the Greek and Hebrew, Greek and Sanscrit, Greek and Chinese, English and Arabic, Turkish and Celtic, Welsh and Arabic, Latin and Otaheitan, Latin and Turkish, and English and Persian?

For the answers to these questions I shall confine myself principally to such words as run through a variety of the languages I have mentioned: and several of these words certainly have the better claim to being reputed of very high antiquity, if not antediluvian, because it is so extremely difficult to trace any modern intercourse, sufficient at

least to establish imitation between the nations that use them.

I. The word *sack* has undergone little variation in languages either ancient or modern. *שק* Hebrew, *σακκος* Greek, *saccus* Latin, *sack* Teutonic, Gallic, and Welsh, *sacco* Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish, and *sac* French.

II. *Carim* in Turkish, like *carus* in Latin, signifies *beloved*, *קר* Hebrew, *pretiosum*, *carum esse*. *Caru* in Welsh is to love; and *καρδια*, and *χαε* in Greek, and *cor* in Latin, are from the same original root.

III. *Dant* in Welsh is a tooth, in Indian *dandon*, in Latin *dentem*, in Greek *οδοντα*, in Dutch, *tant*, in Turkish *disch*, in Saxon *shan*, in German *zan*, in Hebrew *שן*.

IV. *Bod* is Welsh for a mansion, in Persia and India the same notion is expressed by *abad*, hence the Egyptian, Phrygian, and Macedonian *abydos*; in English it is *abode*, *abide*, *bed*, *booth*, Saxon *biden*. The world itself in Welsh is *byd*.

V. *Mars* is derived from the Oriental word *Mar* a lord, hence *mayor*, and *major*. The Greek *Αρης*, from which the Latin is certainly taken, is from the Celtic *Ar*, clades. It is curious to observe, that in the Otaheitan, a prince or chieftain is *Aree*.

VI. *Hen* old in Celtic, is the Highland *sean*, the Chinese *chan*, pronounced *shan*, the Latin *senex*, *שני* *senuit*.

VII. *Cano* in Latin is in Welsh *canu*. In Arabic *cainat* is a songstress, Heb. *קנן* *canna* *quâ* *agricolæ canere erant soliti*.

VIII. Some Turkish and Tartarian words are allied to the Celtic. The Turkish *er*, the Tartarian *firs*, the Latin *vir* is the Celtic *ur*, and *gur*, a man.

IX. *Man* as the name for a being is to be found under some form in a great variety of languages in the several branches of the Teutonic, Gothic, Saxon, German, Runic, &c. in the Greek *μᾶνς* *servus*, and in the Latin *hominis*; it exists in *foemina* and *woman*. In Sanscrit *Maan-oosho* is a man.

X. *Canis* a dog, in Greek *κῶν*, is in Chinese *keuen*.

XI. *Tor* is a word extending to many languages, and conveying the same radical idea : it signifies high rock or summit. *Tor* Saxon, a high pointed rock or summit. Pliny says, that the *Tor-etæ* inhabited the top of Cape Cronea—hence *τὸ ὄρος*, *mons*, and the land *Tyra* in Egypt. From *Tor* comes *Mamtor* in Derbyshire, and *Torbay* in Devon, and *Gibraltar*, which is a Moorish name. *Chitor* is a city on a high hill in India; *Taurus* is the largest mountain in Asia; *Torus* a mountain in Sicily, near Agrigentum. Greek *τῶς* and *τῶρις* *circuitus muri*; *turris* Latin, *טירה* Chaldaic, *ædes*, *palatium*; *טור* a mountain, *tower*, English.

Not only the construction and formation of the English and Persian languages are remarkably similar, but there are many words wholly or nearly alike. Thus *sukar* is sugar, *shireen* a syren, *bad* bad; *burden* to bear, *peery* a fairy, *biden* to be, *buss* a kiss, *peer* an old man, *teer* or *tear* moist, *doo* two, *pahar* four, *lib* a lip, *jamin* jessamine, *best* best,

the superlative of good; *semiseer* a scymeter, *nam* a name, *to* thou; *oe* he; *ain* or *ein* the eye, *eisar* easy¹, &c. &c.

XII. Words which denote numerals are very similar in a variety of languages. Take for examples *one* and *four*; *one* in English is *unus* in Latin, *έν* Greek, *an* Saxon, *an* Gothic, *ein* German, *een* Dutch, *uno* Italian and Spanish, *un* French, *aon* Irish and Gaelic, *un* Welsh, *Uynyn* Cornish, *Yunan* Armoric.

XIII. *Four*, in the language of the Gipsies, is *staur*, Latin *quatuor*, Greek *τεταρες*, French *carré* and *quatre*, English *square*, Persic *chuhaur* and *chaur*, Welsh *pedwar*, Gothic *fidwer*, and among the Eolians *τετορε*.

XIV. There is the same resemblance with respect to the name of the Supreme Being. *Deus* is *δευς* in Æolic, *Thoth* among the Egyptians was the name of their god Mercury, and answers to *Σεος*. *Woth* and *guoth* in the Teutonic is good. *Deus* in Welsh is *Duw*, at Mangalor *Deu*, in Cambaia Maha *Deu* is magnus *Deus*. At Mexico *Teu*, Irish *Dia*, in St. Kilda *Tia*, in China, *Ti* or *Tia*. The sounds of *d* and *t* are very much alike, and the letters are frequently changed for each other.

XV. The term which denotes Death is in many languages of equal or perhaps greater extent. *Mors* Latin, in Greek *μωρος* is fate; Hebrew *מו* to die, in Persian *mor* is death, *murden* is Turkish for *mort*, *mir* Arabic, at Surat *mor* is to kill, in Celtic *marw*

¹ Browne's Sketches vol. i.

to die, in the Oschian tongue *mard* is death, and in Islandic *mord* signifies the same as our word, which is probably of Saxon origin, *murder*. More remarkable than all is the Otaheitan *Moray*, which signifies a sepulchre.

XVI. Words which express near degrees of relationship extend very widely. *Father* in English, in Saxon is *fader*, in German *vater*, in Belgic *vader*, in Islandic and Danish *fader*, in Latin *pater*, and in Greek $\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho$: in Persian it is *pader*, in Sanscrit *peetre*. In like manner may be traced פֶּאָר *Papa*, *Abbot*, *Pope*, &c.

XVII. *Mother* is in Greek $\mu\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho$, in Latin *mater*, in Saxon *mother*, *meder*, *medder*, in German *mutter*, *muder*, in Spanish and Italian *madre*, in Danish *moder*, Dutch *moeter*, Persian *mader*, and in Sanscrit *matree*. *Mam*, one of the earliest words pronounced by children, in Welsh for a woman's breast, Latin *mamma* : from giving suck a nurse in Welsh is called *mammaeth* ; a mother *mam*, and *mamma* ; in Arabia and in Lapland it is *am*, in Hebrew אִמָּה . The Hindoos say *mamma* Havah, for mother Eve.

XVIII. *Brother*, *frater*—Gothic *brothar*, Danish *broder*, Slavonian *bratr*, Persian *burauder*, Gallic *brathair*, in Irish *bratair*, Welsh *brawd*.

XIX. The *moon*—German *mond*, Danish *mone*, Greek *mene*, Belgic *mane*, Saxon *maen*, Laponic *manna*, Arabic *manah*, Persian *mah* or *maw*; then, by the change of *m* for *l*, which is very common, in Latin it is *luna*, in Slavonian *luna*, in Irish *luan*, in Celtic *lun*. in Greek *se-lene*, in Gaelic

elane, in Welsh *lhoer*, Armoric *loar*, and in Cornish *lur*, Hebrew לבנה, the white of the moon.

XX. *Αστηρ* in Greek, a star, in Latin *stella*, *τελλω* orior, Heb. לילית lucifer; in French *estoile* or *étoile*, in Persic *ster*, hence *Ester*, *Easter*; and the Phœnician *Astarte* in India is *starra*.

XXI. Water in Welsh is *dur*, and so it is in Irish; in the Phrygian language it is *ydor*: what is this but ὕδωρ Greek, *water* English?

XXII. *Wine*—*vin* French, *vino* Ital. Spanish, and Portuguese; *vinum* Latin, οἶνος Greek, יין Hebrew, *givin* Welsh.

I could show the coincidence in many more points between Greek and Sanscrit, between the dialect of the Hebrides and the remote language of China: I could perhaps ascertain the existence of many Celtic and Egyptian words in China, which prove the ancient connexion between the original families of the earth, the immediate descendants of Japhet and Ham, but the limited nature of my work makes it necessary to refer such of my readers as are desirous of pursuing this curious investigation, to the learned works of Sammes, Pezron, Junius, Skinner, and Parkhurst; to Rowland's *Mona*, Williams's *Primitive Christianity*, and the *Etymologicon Magnum* of Mr. Whiter.

This identity or near resemblance of names which denote the same ideas, and those ideas some of the most striking and important to mankind in every age of society, seems to point to the same source. It seems highly probable therefore, that

one original fountain of speech, and one only, has produced not only those various streams of diction, such as the Celtic, that have been long dried up, but supplied those likewise, such as the languages of modern Europe, that still continue to flow. Hence the history recorded by Moses of the primeval race of men speaking one language, and afterwards being dispersed in consequence of the confusion of tongues which took place at Babel, receives strong confirmation; and are facts which furnish the best reason for the uniformity we have noticed, and which could not, on any other principle, be accounted for, in a manner so satisfactory to reason, or so consistent with the tenor of ancient history.

Language kept pace with the progress of invention, and the cultivation of the mind urged mankind to the increase and improvement of the sounds, by which its dictates were communicated to the ear. From denoting the perceptions of sense, they proceeded to represent by words the instruments and operations of art, the flights of fancy, the deductions of reason, and the results of observation and experience. Hence may be traced the progress of poetry, history, and philosophy. Thus oral expression, from being in its early age the child of necessity, became the parent of ornament; and words, originally the rude and uncouth dresses of ideas, have been improved, as society has advanced to higher degrees of refinement, into their most splendid and most beautiful decorations.

Origin and Progress of Letters.

To fix the fleeting sounds as soon as they are breathed from the lips, and to represent them faithfully to the eye, by certain determinate characters, are the wonderful properties of letters. Those to whom books have from their childhood been familiar, and who view literature only in its present advanced state of improvement, cannot form a just estimate of the difficulties that attended the first application of symbols or signs to the expression of ideas. The pictures of the Mexicans, and the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians, were without doubt very ingenious devices, and mark the various efforts, which human ingenuity can make towards expressing what passes in the mind, by objects of sight: but it comes not within the province of the art of painting to represent a succession of thoughts, and its operations are very tedious and circuitous; so that such a mode of information is very ill adapted to the activity and the variety of mental exertions. The great excellence of letters consists in their simplicity; by a small number of characters, repeated and variously combined, all words are expressed with equal precision and facility. They possess a decided advantage over all other artificial vehicles of thought, by communicating with the utmost ease the various conceptions of the mind. By their assistance in carrying on epistolary correspondence, the warm effusions of affection and friendship are conveyed even to the most remote countries, and

the constant intercourse of commerce, science, and learning, is maintained in defiance of all the obstacles of distance. Learning is indebted to letters for its diffusion and continuance, and to them genius and virtue owe the rewards of lasting fame. Oral tradition is fleeting and uncertain : it is a stream, which, as it insensibly flows into the ocean of oblivion, is mixed with the impure soil of error and falsehood. But letters furnish the unsullied memorials of truth, and impart to successive generations the perfect records of knowledge. They constitute the light, glory and ornament of civilized man ; and when the voice of the philosopher, the poet, and the scholar, and even the sacred words of the Redeemer of mankind himself, are heard no more, letters record the bright examples of virtue, and teach the inestimable lessons of science, learning, and revelation to every age, and to every people.

We cannot fail to observe the great variety in the modes of writing which prevail in different parts of the world. Some nations, as the Chinese, place their letters perpendicularly, and write from the top to the bottom of the page. The greatest number have followed the most natural and easy movement of the hand from left to right : accordingly all the nations of Europe place their letters in this order. On the contrary, it was the prevailing custom of the East, particularly of the Egyptians, Phœnicians, Arabians, and Hebrews, to pursue the opposite practice, and write from right to left.

These various modes of arrangement may give some plausibility to the opinion, that each particular people were the inventors of their own alphabet. A presumption so favourable to national vanity has accordingly prevailed; as the Egyptians attributed the origin of their letters to Mercury, the Greeks to Cadmus, and the Latins to Saturn. This opinion arose from the high reputation acquired by those who first introduced, or made improvements in the graphic art. For it seems highly probable, that all the alphabets now known and used were originally derived from one and the same source, and were brought, at various periods of time, into different countries.

Can any two sets of letters appear to the eye more dissimilar, than the Hebrew and the English? Yet it is highly probable, that the latter were derived from the former. And if we attend to the ingenious arguments of Bp. Warburton, we may carry the origin of letters higher than to the Jewish nation, and refer them to the Egyptian hieroglyphics. He states, upon the authority of ancient writers, that throughout many of the early ages of the world, there was a regular gradation of improvement in the manner of conveying ideas by signs—that pictures were first used as the representatives of thoughts, and in process of time alphabetical characters were substituted, as an easier and more compendious mode of communication, than the vague use of arbitrary marks¹.

¹ Divine Legation, vol. II. p. 387, &c.

Moses, the great lawgiver of the Jews brought letters with the rest of his learning from Egypt; and he simplified their forms, in order to prevent the abuse to which they would have been liable, as symbolical characters, among a people so much inclined to superstition as the Jews. From the Jews this alphabetical mode of writing passed to the Syrians and Phœnicians, or perhaps was common to them all at the same time. The Greek authors maintained that Cadmus and his Phœnician companions introduced the knowledge of letters into Greece. Herodotus records the curious fact that he saw at Thebes in Bœotia, in the temple of Apollo, three tripods inscribed with Cadmeian letters, which very much resembled the Ionic. It is too well known to require any detail of proof, that the Romans were taught their letters by the Greeks. Tacitus has remarked the similarity of the Roman character to the most ancient Greek, that is, the Pelasgic: and the same observation is made by Pliny, and confirmed by the inscription, on an ancient tablet of brass, dedicated to Minerva. By the Romans it is well known that their alphabet was communicated to the Goths, and the nations of modern Europe. And if evidence to this detail of external proofs be wanted, the curious may furnish themselves with very sufficient arguments, in the authentic inscriptions of antiquity which time has spared, by considering attentively the order, the names, and the powers of the letters in the several alphabets just mentioned, and by examining in the learned works of Montfaucon,

Shuckford, and Warburton, the characters themselves, how they have gradually been altered, and have deviated from the first forms through successive changes previous to their assuming the shapes and figures under which they at present appear¹.

Characteristic Distinctions between ancient and modern Languages.

The formation of the modern languages of Europe is intimately connected with the history of the dark ages. The Latin language began to be corrupted in the fifth century, as soon as the Goths and Lombards, both of whom derived their origin from Germany, had gained possession of Italy. From the reign of Theodoric and Athalaric, who laboured to soften the rough manners of the Goths by the refinements of learning, the Italian language gradually assumed its form and character; and its deviation from the Latin was particularly marked by the use of articles instead of the variations of cases, and of auxiliary verbs instead of many changes of tenses.

In proportion as the Goths made more successful and extensive ravages in the Roman empire, their phraseology was blended with that of their captives,

¹ Stillingfleet, v. i, c. i. sect. 20. Shuckford's Connections, vol. I. p. 223. Mitford, vol. I. p. 88. Herodotus, l. v. Terpsich. sect. 58, 59. p. 306. ed. Gronov. Tacitan. l. XI Plinii Nat. Hist. l. VIII c. lviii. Goguet's Origin of Laws, v. I. p. 177.

and the coarse dialect of Provence and Sicily contributed many ingredients to the composition of the Italian language; in the same manner as the fusion of the precious and baser metals at the conflagration of Corinth produced the valuable mixture which derives its name from that celebrated city. As in the features of the Italian ladies the curious traveller may now discern a striking likeness of the faces engraved on antique gems, so in the language of that country he may discover a strong resemblance to the original from which it is derived. If it wants the strength and majesty of the Latin, it inherits that delicacy and melodious flow of expression, which never fail to charm every reader of taste in the works of Dante, Ariosto, Petrarch, Machiavel, Algarotti, and Metastasio. It is the singular glory of Italy, that while the early poets and historians of France and England are become in a great measure obsolete, her writers, who flourished so early as the fourteenth century, are read with the fashionable authors of the present times, and share their popularity and applause.

In the fifth century, the Franks, a people of Germany, under the command of Pharamond invaded France, and conquered its ancient inhabitants, the Celts and Romans. By a mixture of the dialect of these people the French language was formed, which, gradually polishing the rude expressions and uncouth phraseology observable in its first writers, has acquired in later times a great degree of precision, delicacy, and elegance.

Between the languages of Greece and Rome, and those of modern times, a very remarkable difference prevails. The prepositions of the latter supply the place of the cases of the former; and as these prepositions are of a very abstract and general nature, they shew the progress of the moderns in metaphysical reasoning. Auxiliary verbs are used instead of many of the ancient tenses: these forms of expression contribute greatly to simplify modern languages, in point of rudiments and first principles, and consequently render them more easy to be acquired. Still however they are subject to faults, which nearly counterbalance their excellence; for they are weaker in expression, less harmonious and agreeable to the ear, and, as the construction of the words necessarily fixes them to particular situations in a sentence, they are less adapted to the uses of poetry.

Another very remarkable distinction prevails in poetry. Those effusions of fancy which the moderns express in rhyme the ancients conveyed in metre. In the classic authors, the quantity of words is fixed, the various combinations of long and short syllables give a pleasing variety to pronunciation, both in prose and verse, and render every word more distinct and harmonious to the ear. Rhyme was the invention of a dark and tasteless age, and is generally thought, when it predominates in the poetry of a language, as it does in the French, to indicate a want of strength and spirit. It is the glory of the English language to be capable of supporting blank verse, which the

French, from its want of energy and vigour, cannot admit even in tragic composition.

Rhyme is frequently the source of redundancy and feebleness of expression, as even among the most admired writers instances frequently occur of the sense being so much expanded, as to be on that account extremely weakened, because the poet is under the necessity of closing his couplets with corresponding sounds. The translation of Homer by Pope, and of Virgil by Dryden, afford striking proofs of the truth of this observation. The verbose passages in many of the finest tragedies of Corneille, Racine, and Voltaire, arise from the same cause. In rhyme, the sense is usually closed with the first line, or at least with the second. This produces a tedious uniformity, which is particularly unpleasing to those, whose ears are accustomed to the varied periods of the classic authors. Rhyme appears not so well adapted to grand and long, as to gay and short compositions. Its perpetual repetition in the *Henriade* of Voltaire is tiresome : in the stanzas of the *Fairy Queen* of Spenser its recurrence, although stated and uniform, is more tolerable, because the pauses are more varied : but it certainly is of all compositions best suited to the lively turn of an epigram, and the ludicrous descriptions of the mock-heroic. As a proof how little rhyme can contribute to the essential beauties of poetry, those persons are esteemed the best readers, who pay the least regard to its regular and stated return, and attend only to such pauses, as the sense of an author naturally points out.

This may be considered as no slight proof of the comparative excellence of good blank verse, and the ancient metrical compositions.

A wider and more accurate survey of nature, and a more diligent cultivation of art, by gradually opening new channels of knowledge, have increased the number of words. Hence we find, that the moderns excel the ancients in copiousness of language upon many subjects, of which abundant instances occur in the terms which express certain metals, semimetals, earths, plants, animals, amusements, and recreations, various machines, implements, and materials employed in agriculture, navigation, and chymistry. In several branches of science, in addition to all that was before ascertained, discoveries have been made, which were entirely unknown in ancient times.

This greater extent and variety of knowledge result from the operations of the spirit of enterprise, and the diligent ardour of research, which have explored new paths, and improved upon former discoveries. But it may abate the triumph of the moderns to reflect, that much of their superior knowledge may be the natural consequence of living in the later ages of the world. Future generations, if they are active and inquisitive, will possess the same ascendancy over the present; and the advancement of language will continue to be proportionate to the progress of the arts and sciences.

By tracing the variety of languages and alphabets to one source, we simplify subjects of curious

inquiry; and we extricate ourselves from that perplexity, in which we should be involved, if we rejected an opinion so conformable to reason, and which, the more accurate our examination into ancient history is, the more grounds we find to adopt. And it is a pleasing circumstance to observe, that while we maintain a system, supported by the most respectable profane authorities, we strengthen the arguments in favour of the high antiquity of the Jewish language, and corroborate, with respect to its origin, the relations of the holy Scriptures.

Our remarks likewise on the nature of language, both ancient and modern, and their comparative excellence and defects, may lead to many useful inquiries and reflections, as the progress of human knowledge is so closely connected with the subject. The art of writing has been the great means of enlightening the understanding, and softening the manners of mankind, and the great instrument of civilizing society, and strengthening the ties of social life. To consider the advantages, which the improvement of languages, and of this art, have conferred upon mankind, would open a boundless field of observation. It belongs only to our present plan to direct the attention to those particular nations, whose languages and history form the immediate subjects of our inquiries.

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

THE impressions made by the conquerors who have settled in any particular nation are in few respects more clearly to be traced, than by the change they have produced in the language of the natives. This observation may be applied with peculiar propriety to our own country : for after the Saxons had subdued the Britons, they introduced into England their own language, which was a dialect of the Teutonic or Gothic. From the fragments of the Saxon laws, history and poetry still extant, we have many proofs to convince us, that it was capable of expressing with a great degree of copiousness and energy the sentiments of a civilized people. For a period of six hundred years no considerable variation took place. William the Conqueror promoted another change of language, which had been begun by Edward the Confessor, and caused the Norman French to be used, both in his own palace, and in the courts of justice ; and it became in a short time current among all the higher orders of his subjects. The constant intercourse, which subsisted between France and England for several centuries, introduced a very considerable addition of terms ; and they were adopted with very slight deviation from their original, as is evident from the works of our early writers, particularly Chaucer, Gower, and Wicliffe, and many other authors quoted by Warton in his curious and entertaining History of English

Poetry. Such were the grand sources of the English tongue; but the stream has been from time to time augmented by the copious influx of the Latin and other languages. with which the pursuits of commerce, the cultivation of learning, and the progress of the arts, have made our ancestors and ourselves acquainted.

The same countries, which have supplied the English with improvements, have furnished the various terms by which they are denoted. Music, sculpture, and painting, borrowed their expressions from Italy; the words used in navigation are taken from the inhabitants of Flanders and Holland; the French have supplied the expressions used in fortification and military affairs. The terms of mathematics and philosophy are borrowed from Latin and Greek. In the Saxon may be found all words of general use, as well as those which belong to agriculture, and the common mechanical arts.

But notwithstanding the English language can boast of so little simplicity as to its origin, yet in its grammatical construction it bears a close resemblance to the most simple language of antiquity.^{*} Its words depart less from the original form than those of any other modern tongue. In the substantives there is but one variation of case; and it is only by the different degrees of comparison that changes are made in the adjectives. There is only

^{*} This is the remark of Bishop Lowth, whose well-known proficiency in Hebrew studies qualified him to pass the best judgment upon the subject.

one conjugation of the verbs, some of which indeed are not varied at all, and others have only two or three changes of termination. Almost all the modifications of time are expressed by auxiliary verbs; and the verbs themselves preserve in many instances very nearly, and in some cases exactly, their radical form in the different tenses. The discriminating powers of these auxiliary verbs are of great use in expressing the different moods. The article possesses a striking peculiarity, differing from that in most other languages, for it is indeclinable, and common to all genders. This simplicity of structure renders our language much easier to a learner than Italian or French, in which the variations of the verbs in particular are very numerous, complex, and difficult to be retained.

The English language is uniform in its composition, and its irregularities are far from being numerous. The distinctions in the genders of nouns are agreeable to the nature of things, and are not applied with that caprice which prevails in many other languages. The order of construction is more easy and simple, than that of Latin and Greek; it has no genders of adjectives, nor any gerunds, supines, or variety of conjugations. These peculiarities give it a philosophical character; and as its terms are strong, expressive, and copious, no language seems better calculated to facilitate the intercourse of mankind, as a universal medium of communication.

Since the Grammars of Lowth and Priestley, and the Dictionary of Johnson have been published, our language has been brought nearer to a fixed

standard. It is now considered, more than ever, as an object of grammatical rules, and regular syntax. Its idioms are more accurately ascertained by a comparison of passages selected from the best authors. The derivations are traced from their original sources with greater precision; and its orthography is now more reduced to settled rules. To the labours of Johnson, as a Lexicographer, our nation is under great obligations; and if he has in some instances failed in diligence of research, or extent of plan, we must at least be ready to allow, that he has contributed more than any of his countrymen towards the elucidation of his subject; he has given his definitions of words with great clearness, and confirmed them by a detail of quotations from the best authors. There is perhaps no book, professedly written upon a philological subject, that can give to foreigners as well as to natives, so just and advantageous an idea of our language, or of the variety and the excellence of our writers.

The derivation of English words, as far as it relates to Latin and Greek, has been frequently and satisfactorily traced: but those which are of Saxon origin were a long time prevalent without sufficient investigation. The Author of the "Diversions of Purley¹," whose natural acuteness and turn for metaphysical research peculiarly qualified him for such a task, has directed his attention to the subject; and the ingenious theory which he

¹ P. 185, &c.

has formed, respecting the origin of the indeclinable parts of speech, was remarkably confirmed by his knowledge of Saxon. He has proved very clearly that many of our adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions, which are commonly thought to have no signification, when detached from other words, are derived from obsolete verbs, or nouns, the meaning of which they respectively retain, but which have been shortened for general convenience, and corrupted by length of time. Such a discovery is valuable, not only on account of the light it throws upon those parts of our language which have been too slightly regarded by all former grammarians, but for the assistance it affords to the science of etymology in general.

Dr. Johnson, in the Preface to his Dictionary, has declaimed against translations as the bane of language; but the learned and ingenious Author of "the History of English Poetry" observes on the contrary, that our language derived great benefits from the translations of the classics in the sixteenth century. This difference of opinion may probably be reconciled by supposing that these writers advert to the state of a language at different periods of time. When it is in its dawn of improvement, the addition of foreign terms may be requisite to keep pace with the influx of new ideas. In a more advanced period of arts and civilization, such an increase is not only unnecessary, but may be injurious; and the practice seems as needless, as the introduction of foreign troops for the defence of a country when its natives alone are sufficient for its protection.

Beauties of the English Language.

A language, which has been so much indebted to others, both ancient and modern, must of course be very copious and expressive. In these respects perhaps it may be brought into competition with any one now spoken in the world. No Englishman has had reason to complain, since our tongue has reached its present degree of excellence, that his ideas could not be adequately expressed, or clothed in a suitable dress. No author has been under the necessity of writing in a foreign language, on account of its superiority to our own. Whether we open the volumes of our divines, philosophers, historians, or artists, we shall find that they abound with all the terms necessary to communicate their observations and discoveries, and give to their readers the most complete views of their respective subjects. Hence it appears that our language is sufficiently capacious for all purposes, and can give proper and adequate expression to variety of argument, delicacy of taste, and fervour of genius. And that it has sufficient copiousness to communicate to mankind every action, event, invention, and observation, in a full, clear, and elegant manner, we can prove by an appeal to the authors, who are at present most admired and esteemed by all persons of correct judgment.

But its excellence is perhaps in few respects displayed to such advantage, as in the productions of our poets. Whoever reads the works of

Shakespeare, Spenser, Milton, Dryden, and Pope, will be sensible that they employ a kind of phraseology which may be said to be sacred to the Muses. It is distinguished from prose, not merely by the harmony of numbers, but by the great variety of its appropriate terms and phrases. A considerable degree of beauty results likewise from the different measures employed in poetry. The Allegro and Penseroso of Milton, Alexander's Feast by Dryden, the Ode to the Passions by Collins, and the Bard of Gray, are as complete examples of versification, judiciously varied according to the nature of the subjects, as they are specimens of exquisite sentiment and original genius.

One of the most beautiful figures in poetry is the personification of inanimate objects. The genius of our language enables the English poet to give the most striking effect to this figure, as the genders of nouns are not arbitrarily imposed, but may be varied according to the nature of the subject. Thus the poet can establish the most striking distinction between verse and prose, and communicate to his descriptions that spirit and animation which cannot fail to strike every reader of taste. It must however be acknowledged, that it is chiefly to grave subjects—to the details of the historian, the arguments of the politician and the divine, the speculations of the philosopher, and the invention of the epic and the tragic poet, that our expressions are best adapted. It has energy, and it has copiousness; but it accords not so well with the mirth of the gay, or the pathos of the distressed,

as some other languages. In describing the pleasantries of the mind, in the effusions of delicate humour, the sallies of wit, and the trifling levities of social intercourse, the French possesses a decided advantage. In delineating the tender passions, the soothing of pity, and the ardour of love, we must yield the superiority to the softer cadence of Italian syllables.

Defects of the English Language.

Although it is natural to indulge a partiality to our native language, as well as to our native soil; yet this prepossession ought not to make us blind to the defects either of the one or the other. We shall only advert to the principal imperfections of the language. Most of the words, except such as are of Roman or Grecian origin, are monosyllables, and are terminated by consonants; and this makes our pronunciation rugged and broken, and unlike the regular and easy flow of classic phraseology. Many of them are harsh and inharmonious; and there are some syllables which can scarcely be pronounced by an Italian or a Frenchman, whose organs of speech are habituated to softer expressions. "It is to the consonant terminations that the harshness of our language may be imputed. The melody of a language depends greatly upon its vowel terminations. In English not more than a dozen common words end in *a*; about two dozen end in *o*. In *y* we have no less than 4900 words, about an eighth of our

language; our words amounting to about 35,000¹.

The want of different terminations in verbs, as it introduces the frequent use of auxiliary verbs, too frequently obliges us to express our meaning by circumlocutions. There is no distinction in the persons of the plural number of verbs, nor in the tenses or persons of the passive voice. This is oftentimes the cause of ambiguity, and foreigners, in the perusal of our books, must be very much at a loss, without the closest attention to the preceding and subsequent parts of sentences, to understand the particular sense of many passages. Our accents are calculated to give considerable variety to pronunciation; but the prevailing mode of throwing them back, in some cases, to the first syllable of a word, in a great degree destroys their use; and gives an indistinct, hurried, and almost unintelligible sound to the other syllables. None of the modern languages of Europe are so strongly marked by accents as our own. Their peculiar advantage is evident in poetry, as we are enabled to support the varied numbers of blank verse; and this circumstance gives us a decided superiority over the French. Zealous as some authors have been to establish the excellence of the English with respect to quantity, and to prove that it is in itself harmonious and musical, we must, after all their ingenious arguments, be obliged to leave to the Greeks and Latins the regular and uniform distinctions of long and short syllables; for although there

¹ Heron's Letters, p. 247.

are many of our words, which we can affirm to be long or short, yet a great number of them cannot be said to be of any determinate quantity.

The mode of spelling appears to have been in former times extremely vague and unsettled. It is not uncommon to find in our old writers the same word spelt differently, even in the same page. Orthography began to be more an object of attention, and was rescued from its great uncertainty at the beginning of the last century. Yet authors of considerable eminence have differed much from each other in their modes of spelling some particular words, and have adjusted their practice to their own ideas of propriety. This has given a very stiff and pedantic appearance to their writings. Nor has the influence of their authority had any effect upon the prevailing customs, or rescued them from the imputation of singularity and affectation. Dr. Lardner was desirous of reviving the old mode of spelling in some instances, as in *goodnesse, forgivenesse, &c.* Benson, a commentator on St. Paul's Epistles, wrote *præface, præfix, prævail, procede, persue*, and *explane*, like Lardner. Dr. Middleton, a more elegant writer, attempted similar innovations; and Upton, the learned commentator on Shakespeare, tires his readers by the repetition of the word *tast* for the substantive taste.

Our orthography remained in this fluctuating state, till at length, what was the general wish, what many had attempted in vain, and what seemed to require the united efforts of numbers, was accomplished by the diligence and the acuteness of one

man. “ Dr. Johnson published his Dictionary; and as the weight of truth and reason is irresistible, its authority has nearly fixed the external form of our language, and from its decisions few appeals have yet been made. Indeed so convenient is it to have one acknowledged standard to recur to—so much preferable, in matters of this nature, is a trifling degree of irregularity to a continual change, and fruitless pursuit of unattainable perfection, that it is earnestly to be hoped, that no author will henceforth on slight grounds be tempted to innovate. The innovations even of Voltaire have judiciously been rejected in France. Dr. Johnson is every where the declared enemy of unnecessary innovation. The principles, on which he founds his improvements, are the stable ones of etymology and analogy : the former science, will not soon be more completely understood than it was by him; and if in the latter a few steps may have been made beyond the limits of his observation, they have been gained only by the pursuit of minute researches, inconsistent with the greatness of his undertaking ¹. ”

It is the opinion of this learned Lexicographer, that as we received many of our words originally of Latin derivation, through the medium of the French, we ought to follow the latter mode of spelling in preference to the former. Good as this general rule may be thought, there are some exceptions, which in compliance with prevailing

¹ Narcs's Orthoepey, p. 269.

custom he readily admits himself. "The rule required him to write *enquire* from the French *enquerir*, not *inquire*. The termination in *our* is one of those which has created much dispute. At present the practice seems to favour the rejection of *u* in all words of more than two syllables. Johnson spells *author* without a final *u*, but always writes *honour* and *favour*¹."

It may be remarked as a general rule, that the most judicious attention that can be paid to orthography in general, must necessarily consist in distinguishing those irregularities which are inherent in the language itself, from those introduced by the capricious, the fashionable, and the ignorant.

The preceding observations have chiefly related to words considered by themselves. It may be proper, in the next place, to make some remarks upon our composition, or the arrangement and connexion of words, as they constitute sentences. In this respect all modern languages fall short of the ancient, which are distinguished by a peculiar roundness, harmony, and compass of period. The Greeks and Romans, by having different genders and terminations of their verbs and nouns, gave a precision to their meaning, which enabled them to diversify the order of construction, in an infinite variety of modes without any injury to the general sense. Of this advantage our language is in a great degree incapable by reason of the simplicity of its structure. It will indeed admit of

¹ Nares, p. 276.

the transposition of the members of a sentence; but the transposition of words, except in poetry, seems to be contrary to its genius. Our words in general are placed in the natural order of construction; and to this standard we endeavour to reduce both our literal and free translations of Greek and Latin authors: in the works of our writers we seek in vain for that condenseness of ideas, and for those close and connected parts of a sentence, and that judicious position of the principal idea in the most advantageous place, which have so striking an effect in the composition of the classics.

Sir T. Browne—Dr. Johnson—Mr. Gibbon.

The cultivation of the learned languages since the reign of Henry VIII has introduced many words of Latin origin into the conversation and the writings of the English. The attention paid to Italian literature, particularly in the reign of Elizabeth, contributed to increase their number. In the works of Shakespeare we find many such words; and those, which his imperfect knowledge of Latin and Greek did not afford him the opportunity of taking immediately from the classics, he probably borrowed from the same translations, which furnished many of his plots, speeches, and characters. Yet he seems to have considered the too free admission of this strange phraseology as an object of occasional censure, and has therefore exposed it to ridicule with great effect in the

ludicrous characters of Holofernes and Pistol. The dramatic productions of Ben Jonson his contemporary, are much more strongly marked by these exotic conceits. But of all our writers of those times no one seems to have been so ambitious of the stiff and pompous decorations of a latinized style, as the author of "the Vulgar Errors." His sentences are so replete with words, which differ only from Latin in their terminations, that he is entitled to the first place in the school of pedantry. It is very extraordinary, that his own observation, which was levelled against those who indulged in this practice, recoils with the greatest force upon himself. "If elegancie still precedeth, and English pens maintain that stream we have of late observed to flow from many, we shall within few years be fain to learne Latine to understand English, and a work will prove of equal facility in either '."

The affected structure of his style is apparent even from the first sentence of the above mentioned work. "Would truth dispense, we could be content, with Plato, that knowledge were but remembrance, that intellectual acquisition were but reminiscential evocation, &c." That many of his words may be translated into Latin with little more than a change in their terminations, the following passages will show. "Scintillations are not the accension of the air upon the collision of two hard bodies, but rather the inflammable effluencies discharged from the bodies collided." "Ice

' Preface to the Vulgar Errors.

is figured in its guttulous descent from the air, and grows greater or lesser according unto the accretion or pluvius aggelation about the mother and fundamental atoms thereof¹. ”

There is sufficient ground to suppose, that Dr. Johnson formed his style upon the model of Sir T. Browne. He has written his life; has quoted in his Dictionary many of his words, unsupported by any other authority, and perhaps in his works it would not be difficult to trace some plain marks of direct imitation.

Between the opinions and the practice of Johnson there is a striking inconsistency; for in the Preface to his Dictionary he regrets that our language had been for some time gradually departing from its ancient Teutonic character; and yet in his works he promotes this departure in the most studious manner. From the writer of an English dictionary might naturally be expected a close adherence to idiom, and that he would mark the line of distinction very strongly between such words and phrases as were unsupported by sufficient authority, and such as had been fully sanctioned by the usage of the best authors. And from a writer, whose professed purpose it was to recommend the beauties of moral truth to the different ranks of the public at large, and to render topics of criticism intelligible and popular, we should expect few modes of expression that were pedantic or affected. Whether we consider the nature of his

¹ P. 40, 41.

Essays, or the general use for which they were intended, it must be evident, that such subjects call for peculiar perspicuity of expression. Johnson seems to have judged the style of the Spectator more worthy of praise, than proper for his imitation. Our literature indeed dates a new era from the publication of his works : many of his words are rarely to be met with in former writers, and some are purely of his own fabrication *. By endeavouring to avoid low and familiar expressions, he is frequently lofty and turgid ; and to a reader unacquainted with the learned languages must sometimes be wholly unintelligible. His new modes of expression, his involution of periods, his frequent use of the substantive instead of the adjective, and his stated introduction of triads, are peculiarities, if not innovations, which have drawn after him a train of imitators. Some of them

* *Resuscitation, orbity, volant, fatuity, divaricate, asinine, narcotic, vulnerary, empireumatic, papilionaceous, obtund, disruption, sensory, cremation, horticulture, germination, decussation, eximious, &c.*

If these words be not peculiarly Johnson's, I know not where they are to be found. He who loves to drink only from the pure wells of English undefiled, may think they ought to be inserted in the Index Expurgatorius of our language.

Where did Warton find such words as *doctorated, fugacious* ; or Bolingbroke such as *incumberment, martyrised, eucharisty, connexity, platonician, stoician* ; or Shaftesbury such compounds as *self-end, self-passion, home-dialect, and mirrour-writing* ; or Arthur Young his expressive term *acclimated* !

indeed are entitled to praise on account of their possessing sufficient judgment to keep their style in constant subserviency to their thoughts; and others have exposed themselves to ridicule by the ludicrous association of pompous words with feeble and trite ideas.

If our subject required us to weigh the general merits of this celebrated author, as well as to remark the peculiarities of his style, we should readily concur in the commendation bestowed upon his transcendent abilities, and acknowledge, that the energy of his language was oftentimes a sufficient apology for its elaborate pomp, and that our censure must in some degree abate its severity, when we consider the force and the discrimination of his terms, the correctness, variety, and splendour of his imagery, the power of his understanding, his love of virtue and religion, and his zeal for their promotion, so extremely well adapted to the different characters he sustained in the literary world as a moralist, a philologist, and a critic.

In the course of our remarks upon this subject, the historian of "the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" claims some share of our attention. It is a great misfortune for the public, and particularly for the younger part of his readers, considering the great popularity of his works, that he has concealed the poison of infidelity under a honied sweetness of style. Skilled in all the arts of declamation, and studious to please and to amuse us at the expence of correctness of taste, he has confounded the diction of a poet with that of

an historian ; his arrangement of sentences is frequently so much alike, and they are formed in so mechanical a manner, that they seem to have been constructed according to one particular rule. Although many of his characters are finely drawn, and many of his descriptions are lively and beautiful, yet his verboseness frequently fatigues the attention, and his obscurity perplexes it. He endeavours, and often with unsuccessful pains, to give dignity to trifles, and to adorn every subject, whether trivial or important, with the flowery ornaments of description. In various instances he must offend the judgment of those who wish to see the different kinds of composition confined within their due limits, and more particularly expect, that an historian should not depart, either in point of dignity of character, or propriety of expression, from the rules of correct composition. A careful reader of Gibbon will observe that his affectation oftentimes renders his meaning very obscure ; that he deviates from the standard of our language by the frequent transposition of the members of his sentences, and by using words in new and unauthorised senses ; by borrowing French ornaments of style, and by sometimes adopting the French idiom.

It is not easy to estimate how much the Scotch have contributed to the value and the importance of literature. In every department they have exerted themselves with no less diligence than talents. We should deservedly be regarded as too fastidious and rigid, if we were to criticise their mode of

expression with too much severity. We may however be allowed to observe, that their first publications are often marked by those Scotticisms, or national peculiarities, which are in succeeding editions expunged. Hume, Robertson, and Blair, by careful revisions have refined and polished their works, which have very high pretensions to occupy a place next to that of the English classics.

We are the more desirous of pointing out the defects of Johnson and Gibbon on account of their great reputation. We ought not to be dazzled with the splendour of their names; and as we are ready to give due praise to their beauties, it cannot fairly be required that we should palliate, or conceal their defects.

If writers will contribute to make our language unnecessarily more parti-coloured and motley than it was before; if they deliberately add to its corruptions, and hasten its decline, they are just objects of censure : and unless their deviations from its idiom be remarked and avoided, how can the distinction between a pure and a vitiated style be preserved? Without attention to some rules, without a proper discrimination between bad and good models, the language will degenerate, and the sterling ore of the English tongue will finally lose its value, its weight, and its lustre, by being mixed with the dross of French frivolousness, and the alloy of learned affectation.

THE SUBJECT CONTINUED.

OUR language ought to be considered not only with a view to its grammatical propriety, but as a subject of taste. In order to avoid the errors of those who have been led astray by affectation and false refinement, and to form a proper opinion of its genuine idiom, it is necessary to peruse the works of the best and most approved writers.

In the various departments of religion, history, poetry, and general literature, we will endeavour to point out some writers of the purest English—but without any wish to detract from the merits of those, whom the limited nature of our work, and not an insensibility or an ignorance of their merit, may make it necessary to omit.

Let the reader commence his studies with those who were most distinguished in the reign of Elizabeth, when the language began to be refined from its original roughness, assumed a fuller form, and was marked by more distinct features; and let him pursue his progress down to the present times. Nor ought he to be deterred from this design by an apprehension, that he will find the old authors clothed in the garb of rude and uncouth antiquity; for he will make the pleasing discovery, that the language of his forefathers differs in no great degree from his own, in point of structure and formation, and the general meaning of words.

The substance of a language remains for ages unaltered, however the influx of new customs, and

the inventions or the improvements of arts, may occasion some addition to its terms, and some change in its orthography and pronunciation. Shakespeare will of course attract his early attention; and he will find in his incomparable dramas such an accommodation of style to the grave and the gay, the rough and the polished, the heroic and the vulgar characters of his plays, as shews that our language was sufficiently strong and copious to be a proper vehicle for the conceptions of his vast and wonderful genius. The works of Speed, Ascham, Raleigh, Taylor, Clarendon, and Temple, are highly to be valued for the vigour and compass of their diction, as well as the display of extensive knowledge and eminent abilities. The common translation of the Bible, exclusive of the important nature of its contents, deserves great attention. The nature and compass of its phraseology are such as prove no less the powers of the language than the correct judgment of the translators. The words are, for the most part, elegant and expressive, and convey the sublime ideas of the original, without coarseness or familiarity on the one hand, or pedantry and affectation on the other. The manly and dignified prose, and the rich and sublime poetry of Milton, far from being degraded or fettered, are exalted and adorned by their style; and it was his peculiar glory, to apply with consummate taste and skill the flowing and unshackled periods of blank verse, to the majesty of an epic poem. The increasing tribute of praise has in every age subsequent to his own been paid to the stores of his vast

erudition, and the flights of his transcendent genius.

In the reign of Charles II. the reader will find no author more worthy of his attention than Barrow, whose periods are so round and exuberant, as to give a just representation of the eloquence of Cicero. They display to the greatest advantage the energy and the fertility of his intellectual powers, employed upon the most important subjects of morality and religion.

The great Locke, in a plain and severe style, well adapted to the philosophical precision of his researches, unravelled the intricacies of the most interesting branch of philosophy by tracing ideas to their source, and developing the faculties of the mind. In the illustrious reign of Anne, when Britain reached a degree of glory in literature and arts, which might be put in competition with the age of Pericles, or Augustus, Swift in clear and familiar diction, unaided by flowery ornaments, expressed the dictates of a strong understanding, and lively invention. Addison the accomplished scholar, the refined critic, and the enlightened moralist, like another Socrates, brought moral philosophy from the schools, arrayed her in the most engaging dress, called the attention of his countrymen to taste and to virtue, in his elegant and entertaining essays^r.

^r As I have always been from early life an enthusiastic admirer of Addison, considered as a moral writer, I cannot characterise his merits in a manner more correspondent with my original feelings of respect, than by applying to

The prefaces of Dryden are marked by the ease and the vivacity of a man of transcendent genius; and there is a facility in his rhymes, and a peculiar vigour in his poetry, which render him justly the boast of our country. Pope composed his prefaces and letters with peculiar grace and beauty of style; and his poems present the finest specimens of exquisite judgment, adorned by the most harmonious and polished versification.

The works of Melmoth, particularly his letters and translations of Cicero and Pliny, are remarkable for smoothness and elegance of composition. The late President of the Royal Academy has, in his lectures, illustrated the principles of his delightful art, in a manner no less creditable to him as a fine writer, than as an eminent painter, and a perfect connoisseur. The sacred discourses of the amiable Horne recommend the duties of that holy religion of which he was so bright an ornament, in a sweet and lively style. The manly vigour of Bishop Watson diffuses its animation through all his works, whether philosophical, controversial, or religious. But where can we find compositions, which unite the politeness of the gentleman with the attainments of the scholar, blended in juster proportions, than in the Polymetis of Spencer, the Athenian

him the sentiments which Erasmus has expressed of Cicero. “ Certe nunquam mihi magis placuit Cicero tum, quum adamarem illa studia, quam nunc placet seni : non tantum ob divinam quandam orationis felicitatem, verum etiam ob pectoris eruditi sanctimoniam, profecto meum afflavit animum, meque mihi reddidit meliorem. ”

Letters, the Dialogues of Lord Littleton and Bishop Hurd, and the papers of the Adventurer, and the Observer ?

These are some of the principal sources from which may be derived a proper knowledge of the purity, the strength, and the copiousness of the English language. Such are the examples, by which our style ought to be regulated. In them may be remarked the idiomatic structure of sentences, and the proper arrangement of their parts. They present specimens of purity without stiffness, and elegance without affectation; they are free both from pomp and vulgarity of diction, and their authors have the happy art of pleasing our taste, while they improve our understandings, and confirm our principles of morality and religion.

In the course of this perusal it will be found, that in proportion as the great controversies upon religion, politics, and philosophy began to subside since the time of the Revolution, a more close attention has been paid to the niceties of grammar and criticism; and coarse and barbarous phraseology has been gradually polished into propriety and elegance.

As the practice of writing for public inspection has been much improved since the period above mentioned, a remarkable change has taken place. The long parenthesis, which so frequently occurs in older writers, to the great embarrassment and perplexity of their meaning, has fallen much into disuse. It has been observed, that it is no where to be found in the writings of Johnson. Authors have

shortened their sentences, which, in some of the best writers of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century, were extended to an almost immeasurable length¹; and they have stated their sentiments, to much more advantage by separating their ideas from each other, and expressing them with greater distinctness: whether this circumstance may not argue a want of fertility of ideas and a tardiness of conception, it is not our business to inquire. The custom of writing in short sentences must be allowed to detract from roundness of period, and dignity of composition: but it certainly contributes so materially to perspicuity, that it cannot fail to make every reader satisfied with the change.

Conversation and Pronunciation.

Our remarks have been generally applied to the English, considered as a written language: but books have a much more extensive use, than merely to regulate the practice of writers; for they are calculated to correct the errors of conversation, and communicate both accuracy and purity to social

¹ See the first sentence of Clarendon's History of the Rebellion. The second sentence of Milton's Reformation in England runs out to 29½ folio lines, divided into nearly as many members; the first sentence of his second Book against Prelacy is 18½ lines folio in length. There is a sentence in Bolinbroke's Philosophy, Essay i. sect. 2. which is 22 lines octavo in length; and there is another in Swift's Letter to the Lord Treasurer nearly as long.

intercourse. There will always be less variation of speech prevailing among the natives of different provinces, and less vulgarity of dialect, in proportion as well written books are circulated and perused. But the standard of the language ought always to continue the same; it should consist in a compliance with general rules, and the practice of the polished ranks of society. Such regulations at once rescue it from the caprice of individuals, and establish a barrier against the incroachments of commercial idiom, professional phraseology, vulgarity, ignorance, and pedantry.

The correct speaker rejects local and provincial forms of expression for those which are general. He converses neither in the dialect of Somersetshire, nor of Norfolk; but in that elegant phraseology which has received the sanction of the best company. He neither countenances by his approbation, nor authorises by his practice, new-fashioned phrases, or upstart words, that have only novelty to recommend them; whether they are introduced by the great or the vulgar, the learned or the ignorant. Upon these occasions a good taste will prove the surest guide. He conforms to idiom and analogy; and at the same time that he confesses his obligations to learned men for their labours in attempting to reduce his native language to a fixed standard, he forgets not what it is of great importance for an Englishman ever to recollect, that the "pure wells of English undefiled" are supplied by a Teutonic source; and that the genius of the British language, like the spirit of the British

people, disdains to be encroached upon by arbitrary and foreign innovations ¹.

Those who write only for the present times labour to adorn their style with modish phrases. A popular speaker, and particularly a member of the House of Commons, enjoys a kind of privilege to coin as many words as he pleases; and they no sooner receive the sanction of his authority, than they intrude upon us from every quarter in letters, plays, and periodical publications. But such words resemble certain insects that are seen to flutter for a day, and afterwards intirely disappear. The people, ever fickle and fond of novelty, are as prompt to reject as they were to adopt them; and they seldom long survive the occasion that gave them birth.

We cannot forbear to join in the complaint, which foreigners make, that our pronunciation is much at variance with our orthography. The practice of the court and the stage has multiplied these variations, which have been too eagerly adopted in the higher ranks of society. Agreeableness of sound

¹ Quintilian defines and fixes the true standard of conversation with his accustomed judgment. "In loquendo non si quid vitiose multis insederit, pro regula sermonis accipiendum erit.—Ergo consuetudinem sermonis vocabo consensum eruditorum, sicut vivendi consensum bonorum." Lib. I. c. 4.

In words, as fashions, the same rule will hold,
Alike fantastic, if too new or old.
Be not the first by whom the new are try'd,
Not yet the last to lay the old aside.

POPE on Criticism.

is often assigned as a reason for this practice; but in many words two consonants are pronounced instead of one, which surely cannot give additional melody to a word¹: the irregularities in our language are sufficiently numerous, without making this addition to them. Fortunately, indeed, the people at large are not influenced by the changes of fashion, but long adhere to established and ancient usages; and therefore among them we must look for that uniformity of writing and speaking, which persons in the higher ranks of life sacrifice to caprice, and a love of distinction and novelty.

We here conclude our observations on a language, which by the commerce, the conquests, and the colonies of the English, is at present well known in every quarter of the globe. Its reputation seems to increase more and more, as it is of late years become the favourite study of all those foreigners who wish to complete a liberal education. And indeed it may be said, without partiality or exaggeration, to merit their attention; since it contains some of the choicest treasures of the human mind, and is the vehicle of more intellectual vigour, more energy of thought, more depth of erudition, warmth of imagination, and research of philosophy, than any other nation can boast. For this is the language which has conveyed to the world the sublime productions of Shakespeare and Milton; (with pride, with reverence, and with gratitude, I repeat

¹ As in the modish pronunciation of nature, superior, sugar, education, insuperable, &c.

their names;) the philosophical researches of Boyle, the profound disquisitions of Locke, the elegant Essays of Addison, the polished numbers of Dryden and Pope, the nervous eloquence and solid arguments of Barrow, Tillotson and Clarke; the entertaining novels of Fielding and Richardson, and the historical excellence of Clarendon, Robertson, and Henry. These eminent writers have secured its stability, as well as extended its renown; and, as long as literary curiosity retains its hold upon the mind, students of all countries will be inspired with ardour to enjoy such invaluable productions of genius in their original dress.

The prevalence and flourishing state of our language depend not solely upon the inhabitants of the British dominions in Europe. In many of the islands of the West Indies it is cultivated with diligence. Our extensive and still increasing settlements in the East Indies promise to insure its preservation, and open a spacious field for its wider diffusion. The United States of America cannot fail to perpetuate the language of their parent country; and the spirit of literary and scientific investigation, which is rising among them will conduce to this end; since it will encourage the study of those celebrated productions, from which the Americans have gained their knowledge of the best system of legislation, and their most correct principles of liberty.

When we consider the uncertainty and the fluctuating nature of all human affairs, and particularly the great mutability of language, we cannot help

giving way to the melancholy reflexion, that the time may arrive, when the English, which at present appears so durable and permanent, as the standard of conversation and writing, will become obsolete. The caprices of fashion, the wide extent of our commerce, the general intercourse with other nations, and more particularly the predominant influence of the French language, may produce great changes; and Hume and Johnson, Pope and Goldsmith, may become what Speed and Ascham, Chaucer and Phaer, are at present. For the honour, however, both of true taste and the good sense of mankind, we may presume to expect, that the volumes of English literature and science will not sink into oblivion; that the language, in which they are written, embalmed in the choicest productions, and ranked with the classical tongues of Greece and Rome, will be reserved for general improvement and pleasure, and will convey the works of genius, learning, and philosophy, to the most distant ages and generations.

REMARKS
ON THE RISE AND PROGRESS OF THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE:

And a short Account of the earliest Poets, and the
ancient state of the British Stage.

THE Saxon language spoken in England may be distinguished by three several epochs and therefore divided into three dialects. The first is that of the Saxons from their entrance into the island, in 450, till the irruption of the Danes for the space of three hundred and thirty years. This has been call'd the *British Saxon*; the second is the *Danish Saxon* which prevailed from the Danish to the Norman invasion in 1066; the third may be properly styled the *Norman Saxon* which continued beyond the reign of Henry the second.

The last of these three dialects formed a language extremely barbarous, irregular and intractable. Its substance was a Danish Saxon adulterated with the French. The Saxon had much perspicuity, strength and harmony, but the French imported by the Conqueror and his people was a confused jargon of Teutonic, Gaulish and vitiated Latin. The French however predominated; and no wonder, for even before the conquest the Saxon language began to fall into contempt, and the French, or

Frankish, to be substituted in its stead; a circumstance which facilitated and foretold the Norman accession. It is worth remarking that so early as the year 652, it was the common practice of the Saxons to send their youth to the Monasteries of France for education; and not only the language but the manners of the French were esteemed the most polite accomplishments. In the reign of Edward the Confessor the resort of Normans to the English court was so frequent that the affectation of imitating the Frankish customs became almost universal; and even the lower class were ambitious of catching that idiom. It was no difficult task therefore for the Norman Lords to banish a language of which the natives were so absurdly ashamed; soon the new invader commanded the laws to be administer'd in French. Children at school were forbidden to read in their native language, and as all the inhabitants were reduced to the lowest condition, the English name became a term of reproach, to such a degree that Wolstan, bishop of Worcester, was deposed by the arbitrary Normans in 1095 for being "a superannuated English idiot who could not speak French". At that time too the transcribers of Saxon books used to change the Saxon orthography for the Norman, and even to substitute, instead of the original Saxon, Norman words and phrases.

In all probability the Saxon language with some adulterations was still spoken by the country people, but that of the court was certainly French; and students were order'd to converse in Latin

and French. Soon after Norman Saxon poems were composed, the most ancient of which mentioned by Hickes, the celebrated antiquary, were the LIFE OF SAINT MARGARET; and the GESTE OF KING HORN written after the Crusades had begun.

In the latter end of the reign of Henry III, a poem occurs, the date of which may be determined with some degree of certainty. It was written, after the battle of Lewes which was fought in 1264, by one of the adherents of Simon of Montfort earl of Leicester. It is a satirical song or ballad, and ends with a French song; seemingly written by the same poet. At the court of the above monarch was entertain'd a poet, whose name was Henry of Avranches, with a salary of 100 shillings, and call'd *Master Henry the Versifier*.

In the reign of Edward the 1st. Robert of Gloucester, a monk of the Abbey of Gloucester, left a poem of considerable length, entitled THE HISTORY OF ENGLAND in verse from Brutus to Edward the 1st. It is evident it was written after the year 1278 since the poet mentions king Arthur's sumptuous tomb erected in that year before the high Altar at Glastonbury church. In 1303 one Robert Mannyng, likewise a monk, translated into English metre a french book, entitled THE MANUAL OF SINS. This translation was never printed, and it appears that the poem was intended to be sung to the harp at public entertainments. This Robert has likewise written a metrical chronicle of England, partly taken from an old French

poet call'd *Gasse*, and cardinal Bonaventura's treatise *de cæna ac Passione Domini, et pœnis S. Mariæ virginis*.

It has been imagined that the first romances were composed in metre, and sung to the harp by the poets of Provence at festival solemnities; but an ingenious Frenchman, who has made deep researches into this sort of literature, attempts to prove that this mode of reciting romantic adventures was in high reputation among the natives of Normandy above a century before the Troubadours of Provence who are generally supposed to have led the way to the poets of Italy, Spain and France. It is of no great consequence to discuss this obscure point: we shall therefore proceed to observe that Richard the 1st who began his reign in 1189, a distinguished hero of the Crusades, a most magnificent patron of chivalry, and a poet who (according to *Savarie de Mauleon*, an English gentleman in the service of St. Louis) "could make stanzas to the eyes of gentle ladies," invited to his court many Minstrels or Troubadours from France whom he loaded with honors and rewards. These poets imported into England a great multitude of their tales and songs which, about or before the reign of Edward the second, became familiar and popular.

Fontenelle does not scruple to say that gallantry was the parent of French poetry, and Cintio Giraldi, an Italian poet, supposes that the art of the Troubadours (commonly call'd then the Gay Science) was first communicated from France to the Italians, and afterwards to the Spaniards. Some

eminent French investigators however universally allow that the Spaniards, who had learned rhyme from the Arabians, conveyed it thro' Toulon and Marseilles to Provence. The most celebrated romances in those days were, *Richard Lion's Heart*; *Syr Guy*; *Syr Degore and the Dragon*; *King Robert of Sicily*; *The king of Tarsus*; *Ippomedon*; *Arthur's Death*, &c. &c. and as a farther illustration on this subject, romances were so much in fashion in those days that the very walls of their apartments were clothed with romantic history. Tapestry was anciently the fashionable furniture of the houses in England, and chiefly filled with lively representations of this sort. The stories of the tapestries in the royal palaces of Henry VIII are still preserved, and in the tower of London (the original and most ancient seat of English monarchs) are represented the most renown'd deeds of Hercules, Godfrey of Bulloign, &c., &c. which are all enumerated by Warton in his first vol. page 210 — Spenser sometimes dresses the superb bowers of his fairy castles with this sort of historical drapery. William's descent on England was preserved in the church of Bayeux in Normandy, and exhibited last year at the Louvre. Bartholinus relates that the art of preserving heroic deeds in tapestry was an art as much cultivated among the ancient inhabitants of Great Britain, as it was among the Persians and the Chinese.

Dramatic entertainments, representing the lives of saints, and the most eminent scriptural stories were known in England for more than two centuries before the reign of Edward the second. These

spectacles were call'd MIRACLES. There was acted in the year 1110 a play of S^t. Catherine at Dunstable, and William Fitz Stephen, a writer of the twelfth century, in his description of London, relates that London was famous for the representation of miracles. The drama in those days was almost entirely confined to religious subjects, as the most early writers scarce knew any other history than that of their religion. Even on such an occasion as the triumphant entry of a king or a queen into the city of London or other places the pageants were almost entirely scriptural.

In the wardrobe-rolls of Edward III, in the year 1348, we find an account of the dresses furnished for the plays or sports of the king held in the castle of Guilford at the feast of Christmas. There were eighty tunics of buckram of various colours, forty two visours of various similitudes, that is, fourteen of the faces of women, fourteen of the faces of men with beards, fourteen of heads of angels made with silver; twenty eight crests, fourteen mantles embroider'd with heads of dragons; fourteen white tunics wrought with wings and heads of peacocks, fourteen heads of swans with wings, fourteen tunics painted with eyes of peacocks, fourteen tunics of English linen painted, and as many tunics embroider'd with stars of gold and silver.

The religious dramas were performed in or about the churches; but this practice was at last grown to such an enormity, and attended with such inconvenient consequences, that in the reign of Henry the eighth all manner of plays, games or

interludes were prohibited to be play'd within churches or chapels. In these MIRACLES or MYSTERIES gross and open obscenities were introduced. In a play of the *old and new Testament* Adam and Eve are both exhibited on the stage naked and conversing about their nakedness; this very pertinently introduces the next scene in which they have coverings of fig leaves. This extraordinary spectacle was beheld by a numerous assembly of both sexes with great composure : they had the authority of scripture for such a representation, and they gave matters just as they found them in the third chapter of Genesis.

In the fourteenth century flourished two celebrated Scotch authors who have adorned the English language, and enrich'd it with two epic poems. One was *John Barbour*, who wrote THE HISTORY OF ROBERT BRUCE KING OF THE SCOTS; the other *Blind Harry*, who sung the DEEDS OF SIR WILLIAM WALLACE, KNIGHT OF ELLERSLIE. In this century was likewise born the most illustrious ornament of the reign of Edward the third, *Jeffrey Chaucer*, who has been pronounced by Dr. *Johnson*, a critic of unquestionable taste, to be the first English versifier who wrote poetically. Chaucer was a man of the world, and from this circumstance must be accounted the many new embellishments he conferred on the English language and poetry. The descriptions of splendid processions and gallant carousals are a proof that he was conversant with the practices and diversions of polite life. His excursions into Italy, where he

was introduced to Petrarch and Boccacio, and his application in studying the most celebrated Italian writers of that age, particularly Dante, enabled him to cultivate the Italian and Provencial languages with the greatest success, and induced him to polish the asperity, and enrich the sterility of his native versification with softer cadences, and a more copious and variegated phraseology. He manifestly first taught his countrymen to write English, but his chief sources were the French and Italian poets. From these originals two of his capital poems, the KNIGHT'S TALE, and the ROMAUNT OF THE ROSE, are imitations or translations; the first from Boccacio's *Teseide*; the second from *le Roman de la Rose* begun by William de Norris, and completed by John de Meun. The former, in twelve books, is very scarce; it is written in the octave stanza, call'd by the Italians *ottava rima*, which Boccacio adopted from the old French *chansons*, and first introduced among his countrymen: the latter is very much esteemed by the French.

Another of Chaucer's celebrated poems is TROILUS AND CRESSIDA, formed on an old history written by Lollius, a native of Urbino in Italy. This poem, altho' almost as long as the *Æneid*, was intended to be sung to the harp, as well as read. But what is most esteemed of this early poet are his CANTERBURY TALES, dressed up in modern English by Pope. The origin of them was this. A company of pilgrims, on their journey to visit the shrine of *Thomas a Becket*, agree to relieve the fatigue of the journey by telling each a story, in

the manner described by Boccacio in his *Decameron*—His SQUIRE'S TALE is written in a higher strain, and the imagination of this story consists in Arabian fiction engrafted on Gothic chivalry. The story of PATIENCE GRISELDA, imitated from Boccacio, THE TALE OF NONNES PRIEST, JANUARY AND MAY, THE MILLER'S TALE, THE MILLER OF TROMPINGTON, THE TESTAMENT OF LOVE, LA BELLE DAME SANS MERCI, THE ASSEMBLY OF LADIES, AND A LADY OF THE FLOWER, AND A LADY OF THE LEAF, are worthy of being read by all lovers of ancient poetry. The last mention'd poem seems to have taken its rise from the *Floral Games* instituted in France in 1325.

The next poet in succession is *John Gower*. By a critical cultivation of his native language, he labour'd to reform its irregularities and to establish an English style. His capital work contains three parts; the first is SPECULUM MEDITANTIS, *the mirror of meditation*; the second, VOX CLAMANTIS, *the Voice of one crying in the Wilderness*; and the third CONFESSIO AMANTIS, *the Lover's Confession*. This tripartite work is represented by three volumes on Gower's curious tomb in the conventual church of St. Mary Overbury in Southwark now remaining in its ancient state.

In the time of Henry the fourth we find but one poet of distinction *John the Chaplain*, who translated *Boetius de consolatione philosophiæ* with the title of the BOKE OF COMFORT; but in 1417 a Minstrel piece appear'd, adapted to the harp, on the SEYGE OF HARFLEET, and the BATTALLYE

OF AGYNCOURT. In 1420, under the reign of Henry the fifth, *Occleve* wrote several pieces in verse, but he was a very feeble writer considered as a poet; the titles themselves of his works indicate a coldness of genius. Such are: *Fable of a certain emperess*; the *letter of Cupid*; the *Tale of Jonathas*; *Verses to an empty purse*, &c. &c. He translated however *Egidius's de regimine principum*, the *Art of governing*—*Lydgate* flourish'd in the reign of Henry the sixth; but to enumerate his pieces would be to write the catalogue of a little library. No poet seems to have possessed a greater versatility of talents. His principal poems are the DANCE OF DEATH; St. EDMOND; the LYFE OF OUR LADY; the FALL OF PRINCES; and the STORY OF THEBES. Two other poets deserve to be mentioned who lived under the same reign, *Campeden* and *Chester*. The first translated into English verse the French romance of SIDRAC; the second wrote a poem entitled SIR LAUNFALE, one of king Arthur's knights, and a metrical romance call'd THE ERLE OF TOULOUSE. About this time, James the first, king of Scotland, who was atrociously murder'd at Perth in 1436, wrote an allegorical poem entitled THE KING'S COMPLAINT, in the seven line stanzas; and the next remarkable poet after Chester was *John Harding*, who wrote the CHRONICLE OF ENGLAND in verse.

It was at this epoch that the first mention of the king's poet occurs under the appellation of *Laureate*. *John Kay* was appointed poet laureate to Edward the fourth. It is extraordinary that he has

left no pieces of poetry to prove his poetic talents. *Norton* and *Ripley* wrote some didactic poems on Chymistry, and about the year 1470 *Thomas Rowlie* is supposed to have written some elegant pieces, not long since discover'd at Bristol. He was a secular priest of that place, and his chief works are THE TRAGEDY OF ELLA; THE EXECUTION OF SIR CHARLES BAWDWIN; THE BATTLE OF HASTINGS; THE TOURNAMENT, AND CANNYNGE'S FEAST. Some modern critics pretend they are spurious.

The reigns of Richard the third and Henry the seventh abound in obscure versifiers. A woman writer however deserves some notice. Her name was *Juliana Berners*, sister of Richard lord Berners, and prioress of the nunnery of Sopewell. She wrote three English tracts on HAWKING, HUNTING and HERALDRY, which were soon afterwards printed in the neighbouring monastery of St. Alban. From an abbess one might more reasonably have expected a manual of meditations, or other pious and exemplary essays. One *Barklay* is mention'd to have written, in 1508, a poem under the title of the SHIP OF FOOLS, and *William Dunbar*, a Scotch poet, the THISTLE AND ROSE, and GOLDEN TERGE with many comic pieces. *Gawen Douglas* likewise translated the *Æneid*, and *Sir David Lindsay* publish'd two pieces called DREME and MONARCHIE. *Skelton* appear'd in the reign of Henry the eighth, but apply'd his wit and learning to scurrilities and ridiculous matters. His WHY COME YE NOT TO THE COURT is one of his best satires.

The reader will permit a digression on the origin of Mysteries or Miracles already mentioned. The ecclesiastical performances in churches and consecrated grounds gave rise to the practice of performing plays in universities, colleges and schools. In the middle of the 16.th century queen Elisabeth having visited the university of Oxford, she was entertained with a latin comedy call'd *Marcus Geminus*, the latin tragedy of *Progne*, and an english comedy on the story of Chaucer's *Palamon* and *Arcite*, all acted by the students. The queen's observations on the persons of the last mentioned piece deserve notice — When the play was over, she summoned the poet into her presence, whom she loaded with thanks and compliments; and at the same time turning to her courtiers, remarked that *Palamon* was so justly drawn as a lover that he certainly must have been in love indeed: that *Arcite* was a *right martial knight, having a swart and manly countenance*, yet with the aspect of a Venus clad in armour: that the lovely Emilia was a virgin of uncorrupted purity and unblemished simplicity, and that altho' she sung so sweetly, and gathered flowers alone in the garden, she preserved her chastity undeflowered. The part of *Emilia* was acted by a boy of fourteen years of age, habited like a young princess, whose performance so captivated Elisabeth that she gave him a present of eight guineas. We have mentioned these peculiarities because they are at once a curious picture of the romantic pedantry of the times, and of the characteristical turn and predominant propensities

of the queen's mind. In 1564 Elisabeth honoured the university of Cambridge with a royal visit, and was present at the exhibition of the *Aulularia* of Plautus, and the tragedies of *Dido* and of *Hezekiah* in English. These plays were performed in the chapel of king's college, lighted by the royal guard, each bearing a staff torch in his hand.

Let us now return to the poets. — Henry the eighth, with many boisterous qualities, was magnificent and affable, and had he never murdered his wives his politeness to the fair sex would remain unimpeached. His frequent masques and tournaments encouraged a high spirit of romantic courtesy, and poetry was the natural accompaniment of these refinements. Henry himself was at the same time a reader, and a writer of verse. The language and the manners of Italy were esteemed and studied. *Henry Howard* earl of *Surrey*, with a mistress perhaps as beautiful as *Laura*, led the way to great improvements in English poetry. He celebrated in his elegant sonnets the charms of *Geraldina* the fair, the daughter of *Gerald Fitzgerald* earl of *Kildare*. She is supposed to have been one of queen *Catherine's* maids of honor. Lord *Surrey's* poems were in high reputation, and he is said to be the ingenious author of the MUSES' LIBRARY.

Sir *Thomas Wyatt* was inferior to *Surrey*, and wrote chiefly moral maxims in poetry. His poems, and those of *Surrey* form the first poetical miscellany in the English language, to which were annexed compositions of sir *Francis Bryan*, *George Boleyn*, and Lord *Vaux*. This collection may be properly

said to contain the first true pastorals in English. Lord *Surrey* was the first poet who wrote in blank verse, and *Nicholas Grimoald* the second in his poem on the DEATH OF MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO, and of ZOROAS, an Egyptian astronomer, who was killed in Alexander's first battle with the Persians. Among the minor poets of the reign of Henry the eighth we shall only mention *John Heywood*, commonly call'd the epigrammatist, who appears to have lived comfortably under the smiles of royal patronage; and what the FAIRY QUEEN could not procure for *Spencer* from the penurious Elisabeth and her precise ministers, *Heywood* gained by puns and conceits. He is call'd by some English authors the first writer of comedies, but those who say this speak without determinate ideas, and confound comedies with moralities and interludes. His comedies, most of which appeared before the year 1534, are destitute of plot, humor or character: they consist of low incidents, and the language of ribaldry. It must however be allowed that he was one of the first dramatists who drove the bible and sacred representations from the stage. The titles of *Heywood's* plays have something comical; for instance: the PLAY OF FOUR P.S. *a new* and merry interlude of a PALMER, PARDONER, POTYCARY, and PEDLAR; the PLAY of LOVE; the PLAY of GENTLENESS; a PLAY of JOHAN *the husband*, TYB *the wife*, and Syr JOHAN *the preeste &c.* This whimsical author wrote likewise a very long poem of 98 chapters in the octave stanza call'd

the SPIDER and the FLY; a work without fancy, meaning or moral.

Sir *Thomas More* has left a few obsolete poems which claim some notice as productions that contributed to restore literature in England. The most remarkable of them are these: A MERRY JEST; A RUFULL LAMENTATION; and the TWELVE RULES of PICUS MIRANDULA. In 1549 *William Baldwin* translated into English verse SOLOMON'S SONG of SONGS which he dedicated to Edward the sixth; and nineteen of the psalms were published in rhyme by *Francis Seagar* in 1553, with musical notes, and inscribed to lord Russel. But a considerable contributor to metrical theology was *Robert Crowley*, who not only translated the psalter into popular rhyme, but even the litany, and publish'd a kind of poem entitled THE VOICE OF THE LAST TRUMPET BLOWN BY THE SEVENTH ANGEL. He also attacked the abuses of his age in 31 epigrams, and printed a sermon in verse on *Pleasure* and *Pain, Heaven* and *Hell*. About the same time appeared another theological poet, *Christopher Tye*, who translated the ACTS OF THE APOSTLES into familiar metre, and dedicated them to Edward the sixth, who used to sing and accompany them to his lute.

But it is not our intention to pursue any further the crowd of religious rhymers who darkened the lustre, and enervated the force of the divine pages. About the same epoch we find *Kelton* who wrote the CHRONICLE OF THE BRUTES in English verse at the end of which is their *genealogy*; and

we shall take notice that the first DRINKING BALLAD appeared in 1551. The following stanza, as a short specimen, will shew what progress poetry had made in the 16th. century:

I cannot eat but little meat,
My stomach is not good;
But sure I think that I can drink
With him that wears a hood. (*a Monk*)

Tho' I go bare take ye no care,
I nothing am a colde;
I stufte my skin so full within
Of joly goode ale and olde.

Bach and side go bare, go bare,
Both foot and hand go colde;
But, belly, God send thee good ale inoughe,
Whether it be new or olde!

The above song opens the second act of GAMMER'S GURTON'S NEEDLE, a comedy written and printed in 1551, and soon afterwards acted at Christ's Church in Cambridge.

In the turbulent and unpropitious reign of queen Mary a poem was planned, that illuminates with no common lustre that interval of darkness which occupies the annals of English poetry from Surrey to Spencer, entitled A MIROUR FOR MAGISTRATES. More writers than one were concerned in the execution of this piece. But its primary inventor, and most distinguished contributor was Thomas *Sackville*, lord *Bathurst*, Earl *Dorset*. He was an eminent writer and had formed the plan of a poem, in which all the

illustrious but unfortunate characters of the English history, from the conquest to the end of the fourteenth century, were to pass in review before the poet who descends like Dante into the infernal region, and is conducted by SORROW. But he had leisure only to finish a poetical preface, call'd the INDUCTION, and one Legend which is the life of Henry Stafford Duke of Buckingham. The above poem was finished by *Baldwin, Ferrers*, and others.

About his time flourished Thomas *Tusser*, one of the best didactic poets. He was by turns a fiddler and a farmer, a grazier and a poet with equal success. All these circumstances are related by himself in one of his pieces, entitled THE AUTHOR'S LIFE. He married a wife by the name of *Moone*, from whom, for an obvious reason, he expected great inconstancy, but was happily disappointed, as may be seen by the following lines:

Thro' Venus toies, in hope of joies,
I chanced soon to find a *Moone*
Of cheerfull hew,
Which well and fine, methought, did shine,
And never change, most strange,
Yet keep in sight her course aright,
And compas trew &c.

He published in 1557 a work in rhyme entitled FIVE HUNDRED POINTES OF GOOD HUSBANDRIE, and a book of HUSWIFERIE.

Among *Wood's* manuscripts in the Bodleian library at Oxford there is a poem of considerable length written by William *Forrest*, chaplain to

queen Mary. It is a panegyrical history, in octave rhyme, of the life of queen Catherine, the first wife of Henry the eighth. It is elegantly written on vellum, and as it was dedicated to queen Mary, on the brass-bosses at each corner are still discernible the words : AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENA ! In the British Museum is another of *Forrest's* poems, in two splendid folio volumes on vellum, call'd THE CHASTITY OF JOSEPH.

The first poem which presents itself at the commencement of the reign of queen Elisabeth is the play GORDOBRUC, written by Thomas *Sackville*, lord Bathurst, already mentioned. This production is the first specimen in the English language of an heroic tale, written in blank verse, divided into acts and scenes, and cloathed in all the formalities of a regular tragedy. It was first exhibited in the great hall of the Inner Temple by the students of that society, and afterwards at Whitehall before Elisabeth on the 18th of january 1561. This tragedy is founded on a tale. *Gordobruc*, a king of Britain about six hundred years before Christ, made in his life-time a division of his kingdom to his sons *Ferrex* and *Porrex*. The two young princes within five years quarelled for universal sovereignty. A civil war ensued, and *Porrex* slew his elder brother *Ferrex*. Their mother *Viden*, who loved *Ferrex* best, revenged his death by entering *Porrex's* chamber in the night, and murdering him in his sleep. There is a chorus of four ancient and sage men of Britain who regularly close the acts.

After this tragedy was translated the *Jocasta* of

Euripides, and the ten tragedies of Seneca. At the end of that century so sudden were the changes or the refinements of the English language that in the second edition of *Jocasta*, printed in 1587, it was thought necessary to affix marginal explanations of many words, not long before in common use, but now become obsolete and unintelligible. Among others are *behest* and *quell*. About this time *Phaier* translated nine books of the *Eneid*, and he did it, to use his own phrase, *for the defence of the English language* which had been by too many deemed incapable of elegance and propriety. This undertaking was continued by *Twyne*, but his performance is much inferior to *Phaier*. The measure of this translation is the fourteen-footed Alexandrine verse. Whatever absolute and original dignity this metre may boast, at present it is quite out of use and almost ridiculous.

After the associated labours of *Phaier* and *Twyne* we cannot imagine what could induce *Stanyhurst*, a native of Dublin, to translate the four first books into English *hexameters*, a measure still more unfortunate than that of his predecessors, which the critic *Nash* calls *foul, lumbring, boisterous* and *wallowing*. The reader may judge by the following specimen taken from the beginning of the second book of the *Eneid*, *Conticuere omnes, &c.*

With tentative listning each wight was setled in harkning:
Then Father Eneas chronicled from loftie bed hautie:
You bid me, o Princesse, to scarifie a festered old sore,
How that the Trojans were prest by the Grecian armie.

Abraham *Fleming* publish'd a version of the *Bucolics* in 1575. His plan was to give a plain literal translation, verse for verse, and fourteen years after he printed likewise the *Georgics*. Virgil's *Bucolics* and *Georgics* were also translated in the course of the same century by *Webb Fraunce* and others, but with little or no success. *Golding's* version of the *Metamorphosis* kept its ground till *Sandys's* English *Ovid* appeared in 1632. It is extraordinary that Horace's odes should not have been translated within the period we are speaking of, and Warton is of opinion that they were first published by Sir Thomas Hawkins in 1625. *Martial's* epigrams by *Kendal*, and *Coluthus's* RAPE OF HELEN by *Marlow* were published in English rhyme, the former in 1577, the latter in 1587. *Marlow* translated likewise the LOVES OF HERO AND LEANDER, ascribed to the ancient *Musæus*, and wrote several tragedies, among which DIDO QUEEN OF CARTHAGE. *Johnson* speaks honorably of this poet, and often mentions *Marlow's* *Mighty Muse*. Philips, Milton's nephew, calls him a second Shakespeare.

In 1581 appeared ten books of Homer's *Iliad* translated from a metrical French version into English by *Hall*. This translation has no other merit than that of being the first appearance of a part of the *Iliad*. The complete and regular version of Homer was reserved to *Chapman* who published in the beginning of the 17th. century the whole of the *Iliad* from the Greek, and dedicated it to prince Henry, with a sonnet to the sole

empress of Beauty queen Anne. In 1614 Chapman printed his version of the *Odyssey*, with other pieces of Homer, and dedicated it to king James's favorite the earl of Somerset. This poet was also a dramatic author; he wrote eighteen plays, which, altho' now forgotten, must have contributed very much to enrich and advance the English stage. *Chapman* and *Inigo Jones*, one for the poetry and the other for the machinery, were employ'd by the societies of *Lincoln's inn* and the *Middle Temple* who gave in 1613 a splendid masque at *Whitehall* in honor of the nuptials of the *Palsgrave* and the princess *Elisabeth*.

This short account of the earliest English poets is extracted from the *HISTORY OF ENGLISH POETRY* by *Warton*, who in the course of his voluminous work expatiates on the merit of every individual author, and gives specimens at large of their different manners of writing. The boundaries of our enterprise do not permit us to be diffuse on so interesting a subject; we shall therefore conclude by inserting a few remarks on queen *Elisabeth's* reign, which our learned author calls the *GOLDEN AGE* of English poetry. "The Laity, says he, who had now been taught (on account of the reformation) to assert their natural privileges, became impatient of the old monopoly of knowledge, and demanded admittance to the usurpation of the Clergy. Every young lady of fashion was carefully instituted in classical letters, and the daughter of a dutchess was taught, not only to distill waters, but to construe Greek. Among the learned females of high

distinction queen Elisabeth herself was the most conspicuous. Roger Ascham, her preceptor, speaks with rapture of her astonishing progress in the greek nouns, and declares with no small degree of triumph, that during a long residence at Windsor-Castle she was accustomed to read more greek in a day, than some prebendary of that church did latin in one week."

"The books of antiquity being thus familiarized to the Great, every thing was tinctured with ancient history and mythology. When the queen paid a visit at the house of any of her nobility, at entering the hall she was saluted by the *Penates*, and conducted to her privy chamber by Mercury. Even the pastry cooks were expert mythologists. At dinner select transformations of Ovid's metamorphoses were exhibited in confectionary : and the splendid iceing of an immense historic plumb-cake was imbossed with a delicious *basso relievo* of the destruction of Troy. In the after noon when she condescended to walk in the garden the lake was covered with Tritons and Nereids ; the pages of the family were converted into wood-nymphs who peeped from every bower ; and the footmen gamboled over the lawns in the figure of satyrs. Elisabeth sought all occasions of being extolled for her beauty, and no negociation succeeded unless She was adressed as a Goddess. When She rode thro' the streets of the city of Norwich, Cupid, at the command of the mayor and aldermen, advancing from a groupe of Gods who had left Olympus to grace the procession, gave her a golden

arrow which was sure to wound the most obdurate heart. Remark that then she was fifty years old."

"This inundation of classical pedantry and mythology soon enlarged the bounds of our poetry, which receiv'd an additional redundance by the numerous translations of italian tales. They gave rise to innumerable plays and poems which would not otherwise have existed. The italian pastoral was engrafted on the feudal manners of Sydney's *Arcadia*. The daring machineries of giants, dragons and enchanted castles, borrow'd from the magic store-house of Boiardo, Ariosto and Tasso began to be employ'd by the epic muse. These ornaments have been censured, but surely the *Hippogriff* of Ariosto may be opposed to the *Harpies* of Virgil, and if leaves are turned into ships in the *Orlando*, nymphs are transformed into ships in the *Eneid*. The imagery of Ismeno's necromantic forest in the *Gerusalemme*, guarded by walls and battlements of fire, is no less marvellous and sublime than the leap of Juno's horses in the *Iliad*, celebrated by Longinus for its singular magnificence and dignity."

"All or most of these circumstances contributed to give a descriptive, a picturesque and a figurative cast to the poetical language. Spencer, Ben Jonson, Shakespeare appeared. The latter wandered in pursuit of universal nature. The glancings of his eye are from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. We behold him breaking the barriers of imaginary method. In the same time he descends from his meridian of the noblest tragic

sublimity to puns and quibbles, to the meanest merriments of a plebeian farce. In the midst of his dignity he resembles his own Richard the second, the *Skipping King*, who, sometimes discarding the state of a monarch,

Mingled his royalty with carping fools.

He seems not to have seen any impropriety in the most abrupt transitions from dukes to buffoons, from senators to sailors, from counsellors to constables, and from kings to clowns; like Virgil's majestic oak which

Quantum vertice ad auras
Æthereas tantum radice in Tartara tendit."

THE END.

A Dissertation on language in general, more particularly on the beauties
and deserts of the english language with remarks on the rise and progress
of the latter, and a short account of the earliest Poets, and the ancient
state of the british stage

Paris 1805

L.g.sept. 15 d

urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10582046-5